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DRAGON AGE™

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DRAGON AGE
2 OF 3

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THOSE WHO SPEAK

DAVID GAIDER | ALEXANDER FREED | CHAD HARDIN

DRAGON AGE™

THOSE WHO SPEAK

Part 2 of 3

King Alistair of Ferelden, accompanied by the notorious pirate Isabela and the dwarven businessman Varric Tethras, has journeyed north of his homeland to discover the secrets of the blood mage Aurelian Titus—a man Alistair holds responsible for the disappearance of his father.

But the journey has been a difficult one. While pursuing Titus aboard Isabela's ship, the trio was attacked by the Qunari—powerful religious zealots dedicated to converting or destroying all other peoples.

Before she became the hired hand and confidante of King Alistair, Isabela made enemies of the Qunari. And the Qunari do not forget their enemies quickly . . .

* * *

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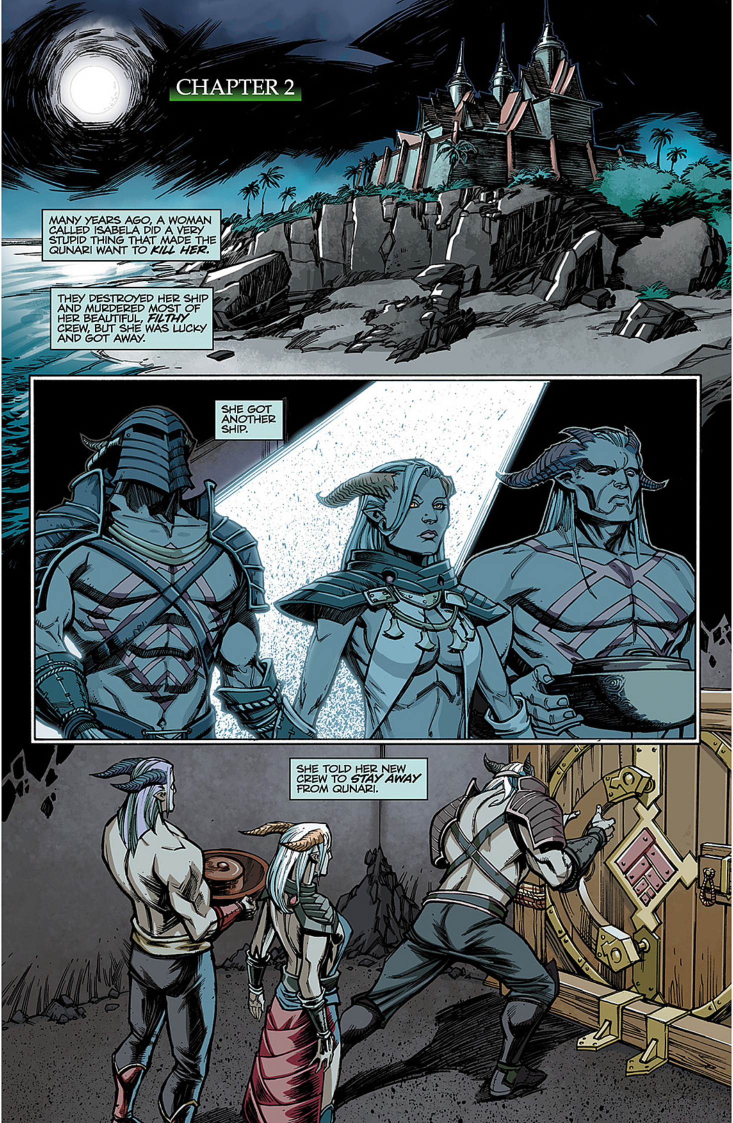
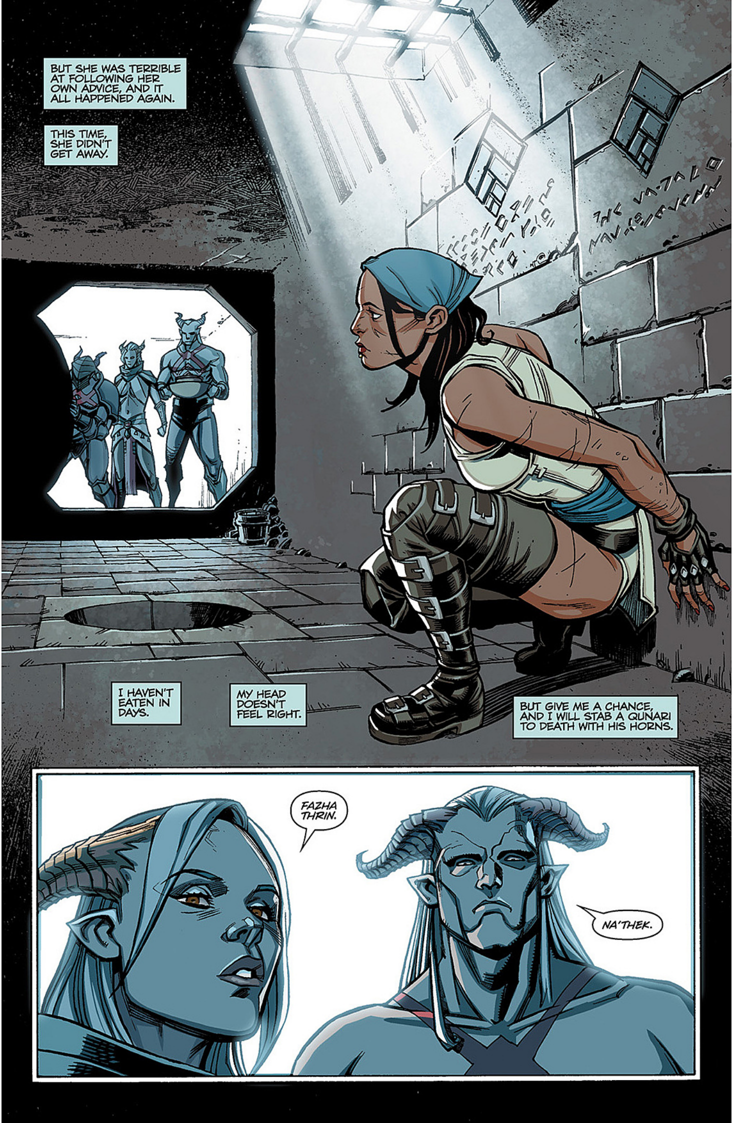
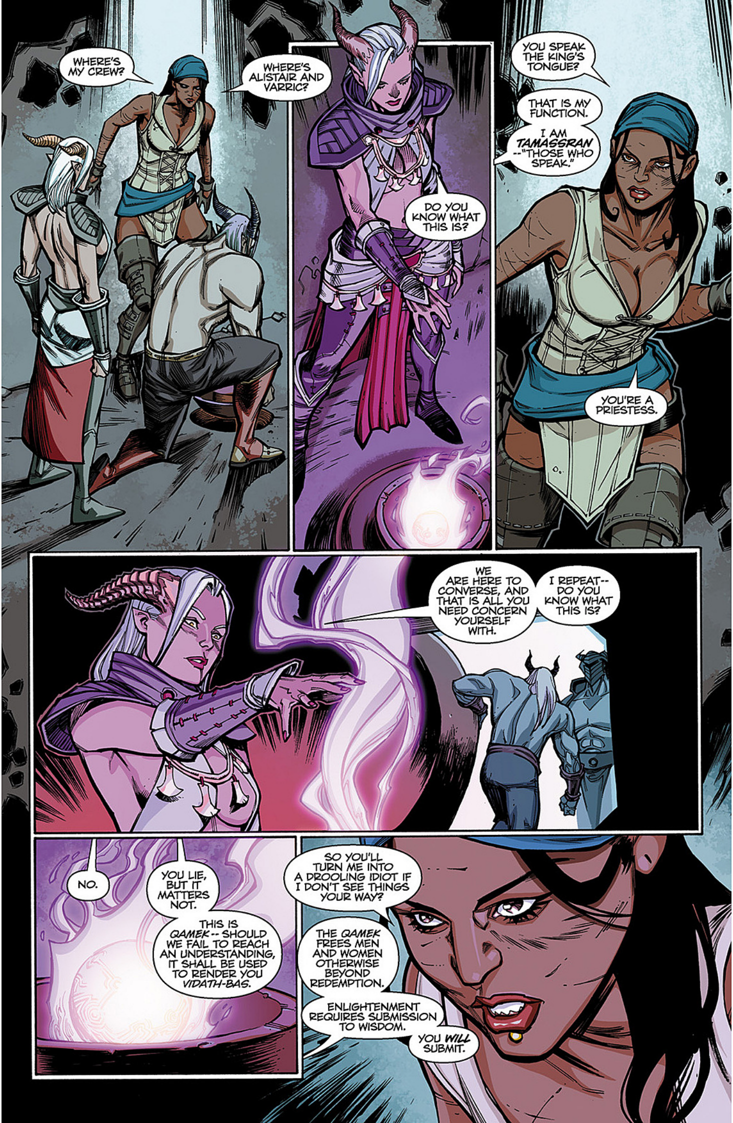
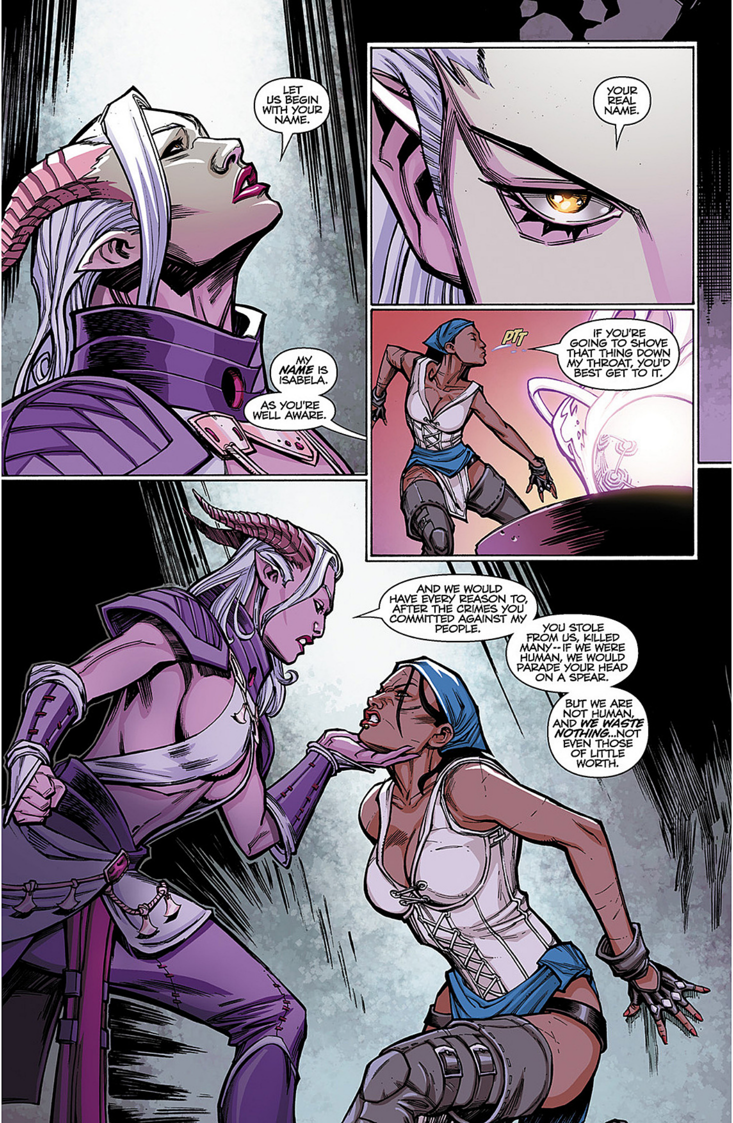
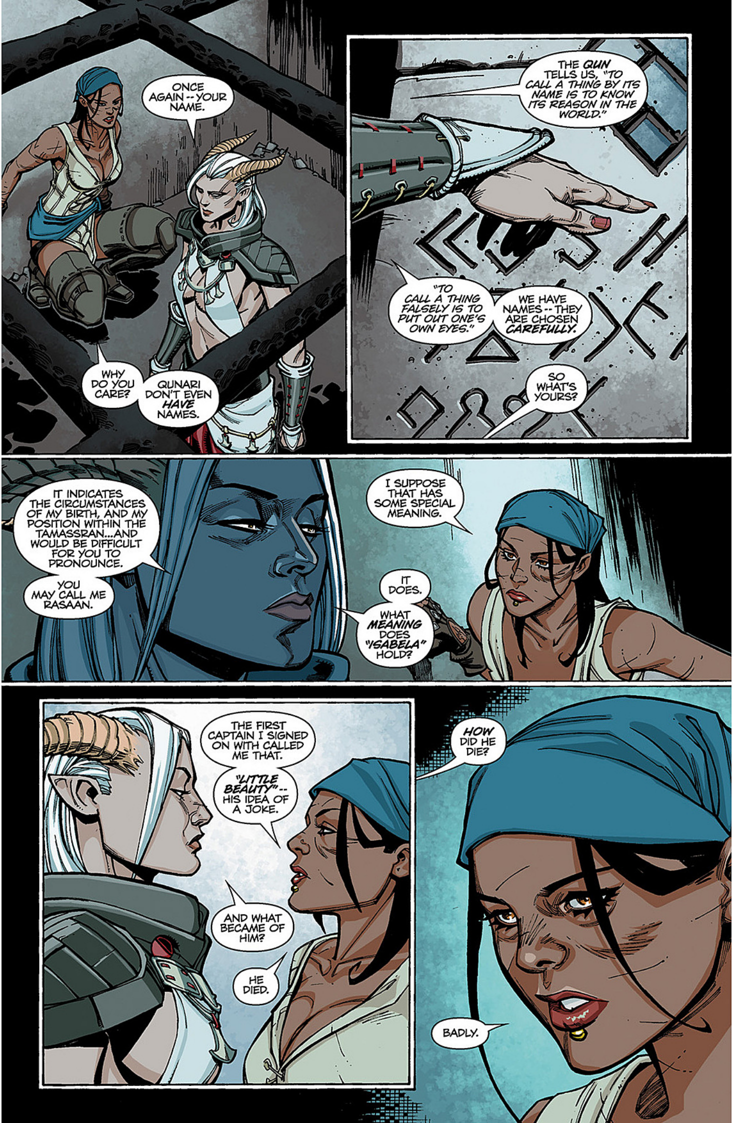
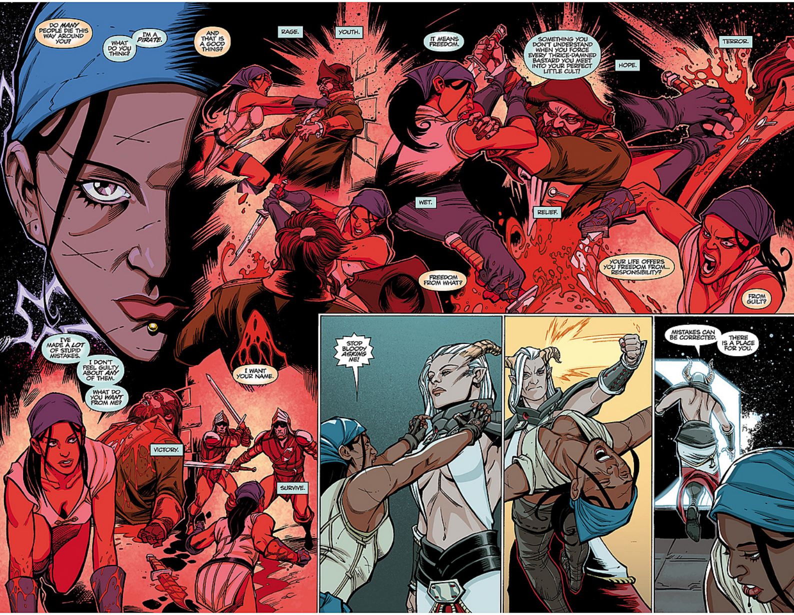

CHAPTER 2
MANY YEARS AGO, A WOMAN CALLED ISABELA DID A VERY STUPID THING THAT MADE THE QUNARI WANT TO *KILL HER.*
THEY DESTROYED HER SHIP AND MURDERED MOST OF HER BEAUTIFUL, *FILTHY* CREW, BUT SHE WAS LUCKY AND GOT AWAY.
SHE GOT ANOTHER SHIP.
SHE TOLD HER NEW CREW TO *STAY AWAY* FROM QUNARI.

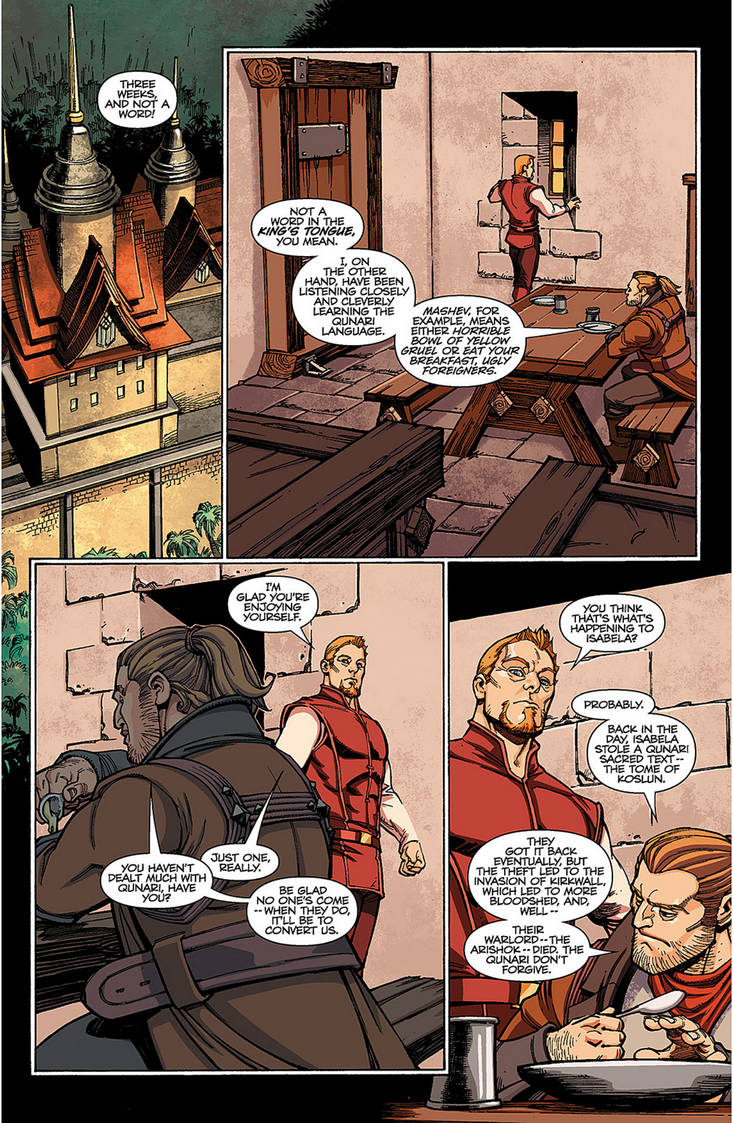

BUT SHE WAS TERRIBLE AT FOLLOWING HER OWN ADVICE, AND IT ALL HAPPENED AGAIN.
THIS TIME, SHE DIDN'T GET AWAY.
I HAVEN'T EATEN IN DAYS.
MY HEAD DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT.
BUT GIVE ME A CHANCE, AND I WILL STAB A QUNARI TO DEATH WITH HIS HORNS.
FAZHA THRIN.
NA'THEK.

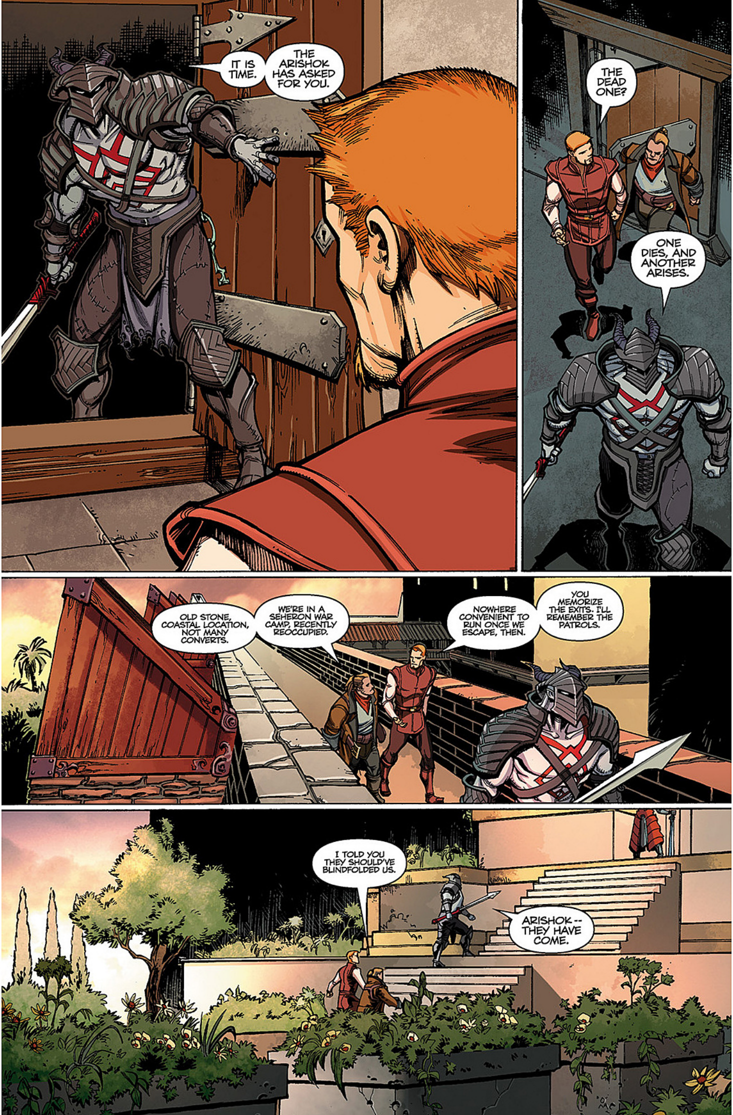

WHERE'S MY CREW?
WHERE'S ALISTAIR AND VARRIC?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
YOU SPEAK THE KING'S TONGUE?
THAT IS MY FUNCTION.
I AM *TAMASSRAN* --"THOSE WHO SPEAK."
YOU'RE A PRIESTESS.
WE ARE HERE TO CONVERSE, AND THAT IS ALL YOU NEED CONCERN YOURSELF WITH.
I REPEAT-- DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
NO.
YOU LIE, BUT IT MATTERS NOT.
THIS IS *QAMEK*-- SHOULD WE FAIL TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING, IT SHALL BE USED TO RENDER YOU *VIDATH-BAS*.
SO YOU'LL TURN ME INTO A DROOLING IDIOT IF I DON'T SEE THINGS YOUR WAY?
THE *QAMEK* FREES MEN AND WOMEN OTHERWISE BEYOND REDEMPTION.
ENLIGHTENMENT REQUIRES SUBMISSION TO WISDOM.
YOU ***WILL*** SUBMIT.

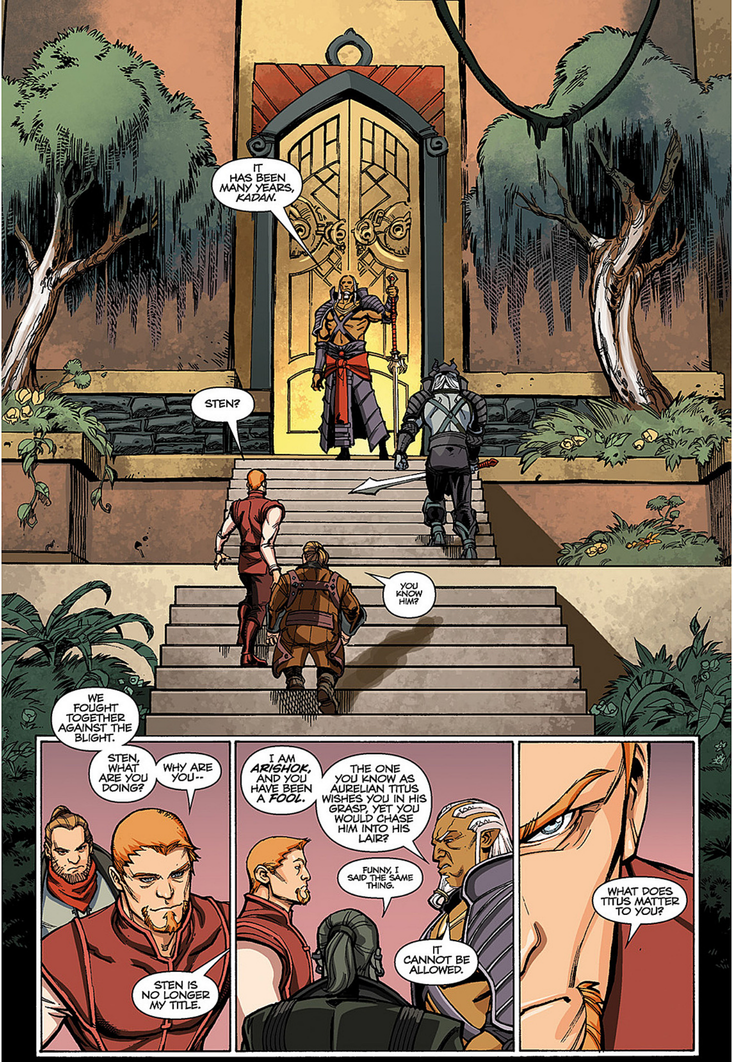

LET US BEGIN WITH YOUR NAME.
YOUR REAL NAME.
MY *NAME* IS ISABELA.
AS YOU'RE WELL AWARE.
PTT
IF YOU'RE GOING TO SHOVE THAT THING DOWN MY THROAT, YOU'D BEST GET TO IT.
AND WE WOULD HAVE EVERY REASON TO, AFTER THE CRIMES YOU COMMITTED AGAINST MY PEOPLE.
YOU STOLE FROM US, KILLED MANY--IF WE WERE HUMAN, WE WOULD PARADE YOUR HEAD ON A SPEAR.
BUT WE ARE NOT HUMAN, AND *WE WASTE NOTHING*...NOT EVEN THOSE OF LITTLE WORTH.

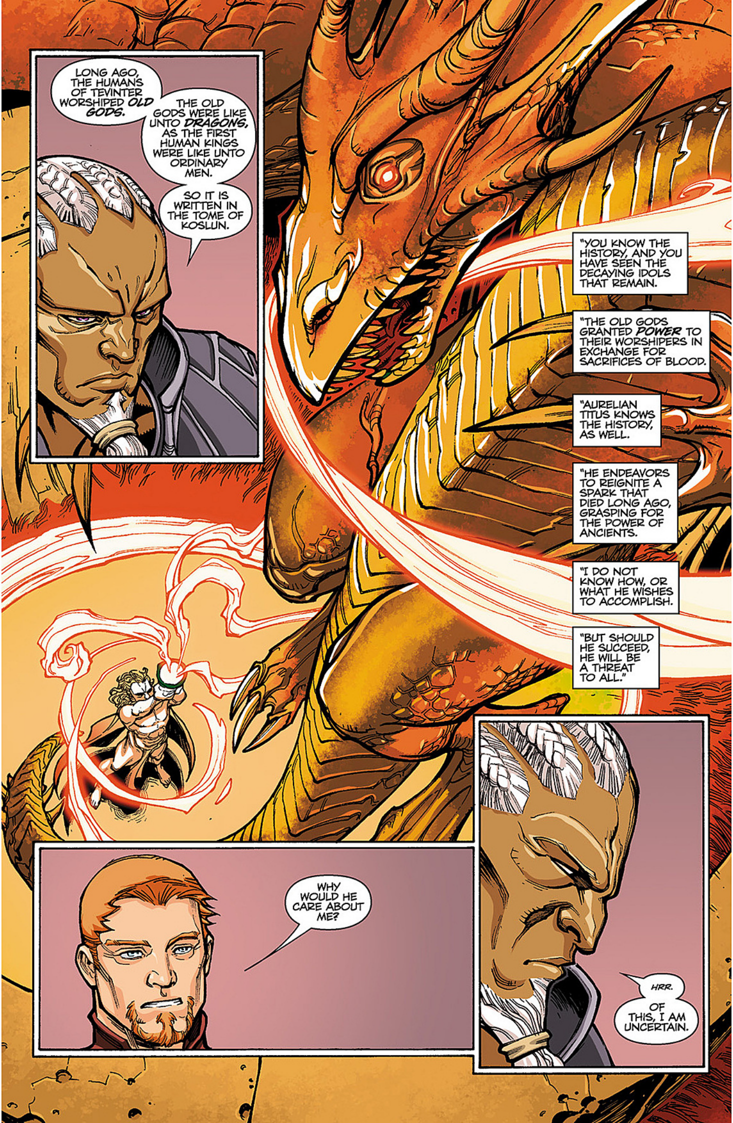

ONCE AGAIN -- YOUR NAME.
WHY DO YOU CARE?
QUNARI DON'T EVEN *HAVE* NAMES.
THE *QUN* TELLS US, *"TO CALL A THING BY ITS NAME IS TO KNOW ITS REASON IN THE WORLD."*
"TO CALL A THING FALSELY IS TO PUT OUT ONE'S OWN EYES."
WE HAVE NAMES -- THEY ARE CHOSEN *CAREFULLY.*
SO WHAT'S YOURS?
IT INDICATES THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MY BIRTH, AND MY POSITION WITHIN THE TAMASSRAN...AND WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO PRONOUNCE.
YOU MAY CALL ME RASAAN.
I SUPPOSE THAT HAS SOME SPECIAL MEANING.
IT DOES.
WHAT *MEANING* DOES *"ISABELA"* HOLD?
THE FIRST CAPTAIN I SIGNED ON WITH CALLED ME THAT.
"LITTLE BEAUTY" -- HIS IDEA OF A JOKE.
AND WHAT BECAME OF HIM?
HE DIED.
HOW DID HE DIE?
BADLY.

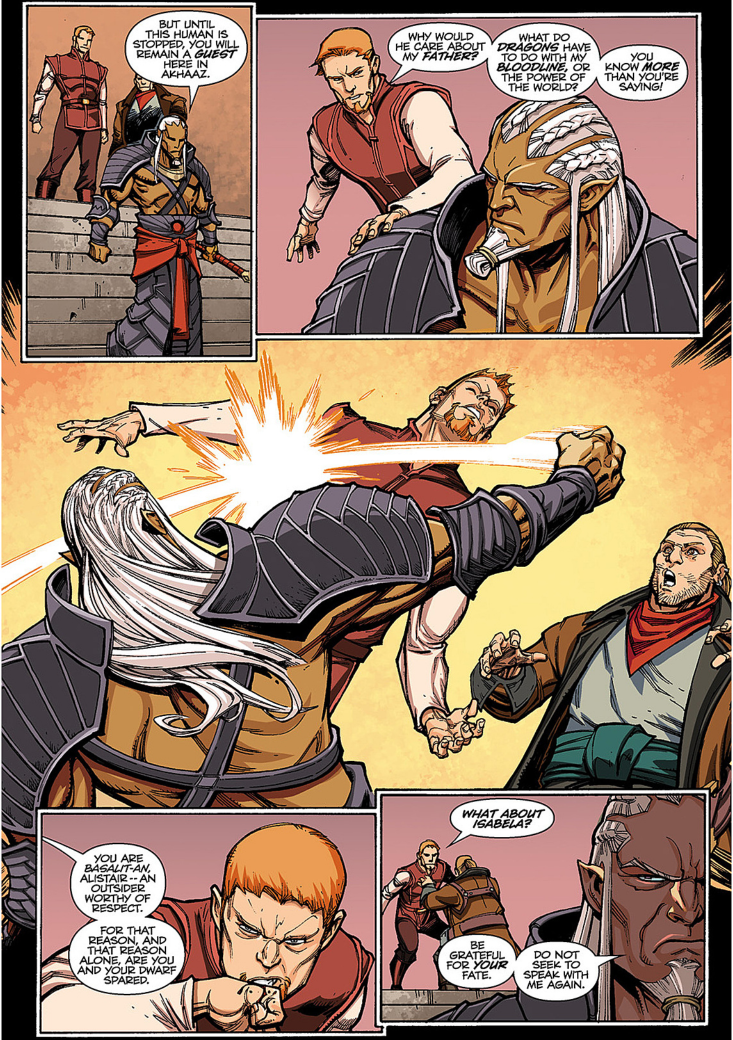

DO *MANY* PEOPLE DIE THIS WAY AROUND YOU?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I'M A *PIRATE*.
AND THAT IS A GOOD THING?
RAGE.
YOUTH.
IT MEANS FREEDOM.
SOMETHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHEN YOU FORCE EVERY THRICE-DAMNED BASTARD YOU MEET INTO YOUR PERFECT LITTLE CULT!
HOPE.
TERROR.
WET.
RELIEF.
FREEDOM FROM WHAT?
YOUR LIFE OFFERS YOU FREEDOM FROM... RESPONSIBILITY?
FROM GUILT?
I'VE MADE A *LOT* OF STUPID MISTAKES.
I DON'T FEEL GUILTY ABOUT *ANY* OF THEM.
WHAT DO YOU *WANT* FROM ME?
I WANT YOUR NAME.
VICTORY.
SURVIVE.
STOP BLOODY *ASKING* ME!
MISTAKES CAN BE CORRECTED.
THERE IS A PLACE FOR YOU.

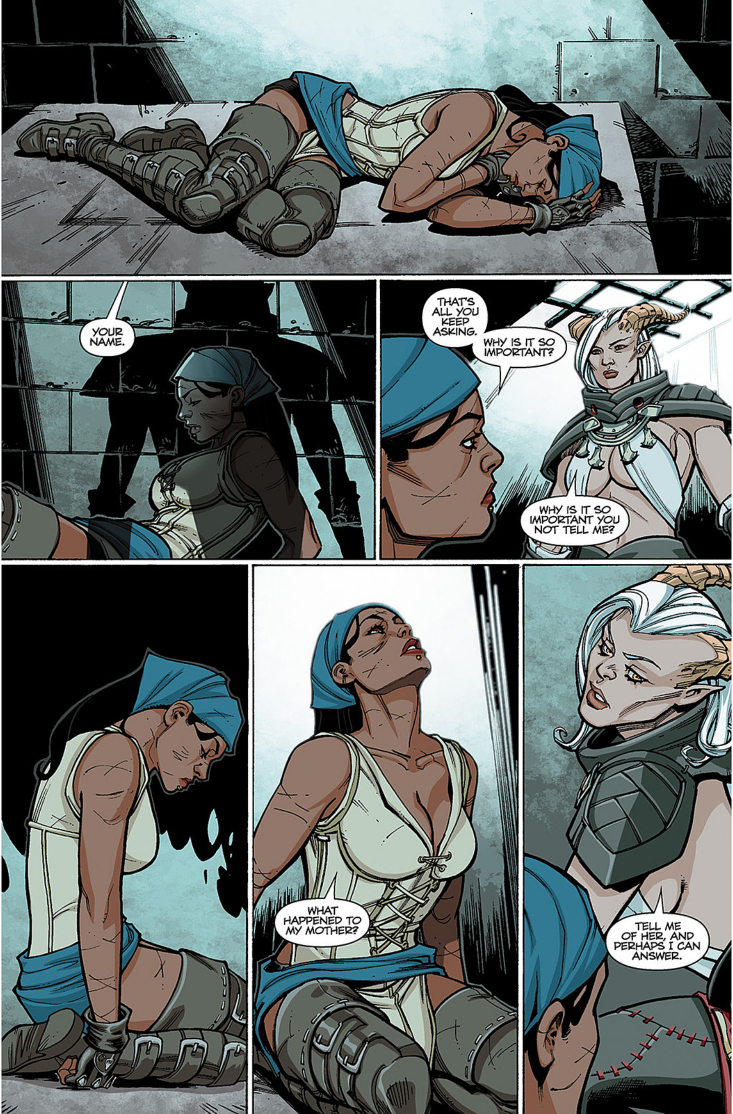

THREE WEEKS, AND NOT A WORD!
NOT A WORD IN THE ***KING'S TONGUE,*** YOU MEAN.
I, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE BEEN LISTENING CLOSELY AND CLEVERLY LEARNING THE QUNARI LANGUAGE.
MASHEV, FOR EXAMPLE, MEANS EITHER *HORRIBLE BOWL OF YELLOW GRUEL* OR *EAT YOUR BREAKFAST, UGLY FOREIGNERS.*
I'M GLAD YOU'RE ENJOYING YOURSELF.
YOU HAVEN'T DEALT MUCH WITH QUNARI, HAVE YOU?
JUST ONE, REALLY.
BE GLAD NO ONE'S COME --WHEN THEY DO, IT'LL BE TO CONVERT US.
YOU THINK THAT'S WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ISABELA?
PROBABLY.
BACK IN THE DAY, ISABELA STOLE A QUNARI SACRED TEXT-- THE TOME OF KOSLUN.
THEY GOT IT BACK EVENTUALLY, BUT THE THEFT LED TO THE INVASION OF KIRKWALL, WHICH LED TO MORE BLOODSHED, AND, WELL --
THEIR WARLORD--THE ARISHOK--DIED. THE QUNARI DON'T FORGIVE.

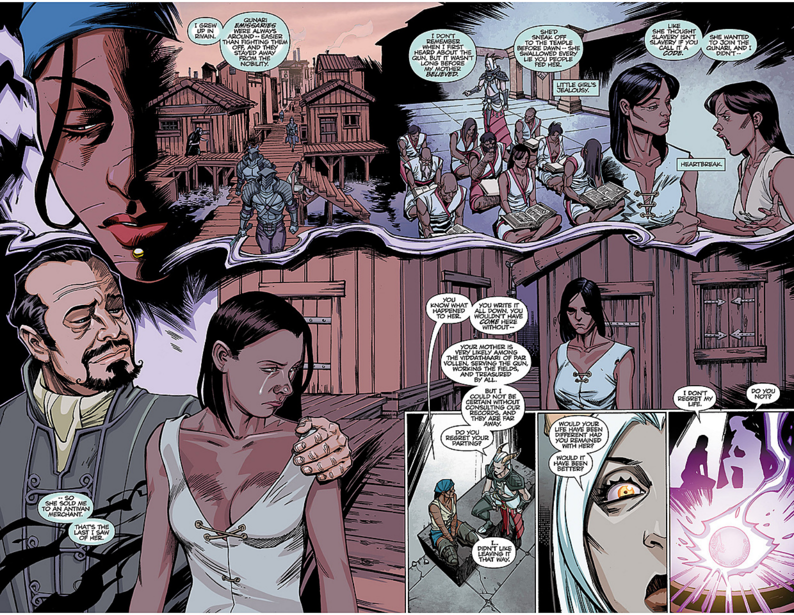

IT IS TIME.
THE ARISHOK HAS ASKED FOR YOU.
THE DEAD ONE?
ONE DIES, AND ANOTHER ARISES.
OLD STONE, COASTAL LOCATION, NOT MANY CONVERTS.
WE'RE IN A SEHERON WAR CAMP, RECENTLY REOCCUPIED.
NOWHERE CONVENIENT TO RUN ONCE WE ESCAPE, THEN.
YOU MEMORIZE THE EXITS. I'LL REMEMBER THE PATROLS.
I TOLD YOU THEY SHOULD'VE BLINDFOLDED US.
ARISHOK -- THEY HAVE COME.

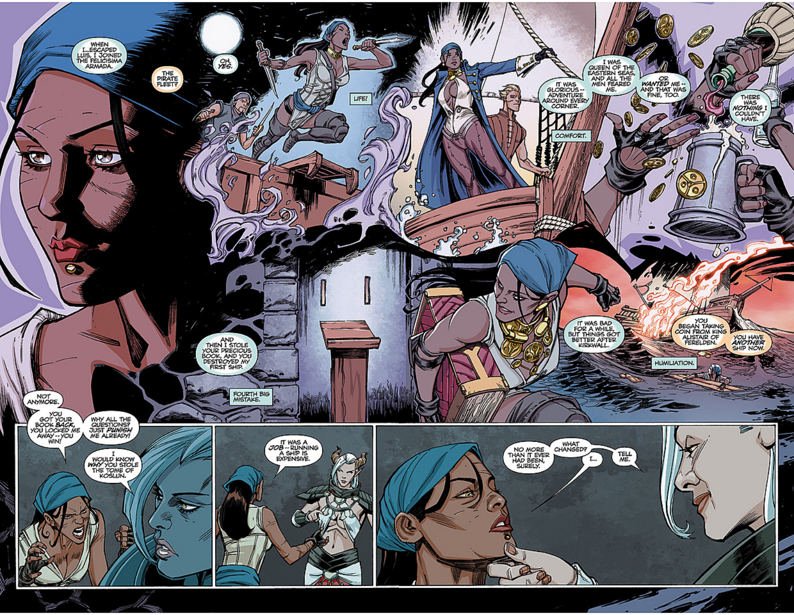

IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS, *KADAN.*
STEN?
YOU KNOW HIM?
WE FOUGHT TOGETHER AGAINST THE BLIGHT.
STEN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WHY ARE YOU--
STEN IS NO LONGER MY TITLE.
I AM ***ARISHOK,*** AND YOU HAVE BEEN A ***FOOL.***
THE ONE YOU KNOW AS AURELIAN TITUS WISHES YOU IN HIS GRASP, YET YOU WOULD CHASE HIM INTO HIS LAIR?
FUNNY, I SAID THE SAME THING.
IT CANNOT BE ALLOWED.
WHAT DOES TITUS MATTER TO YOU?

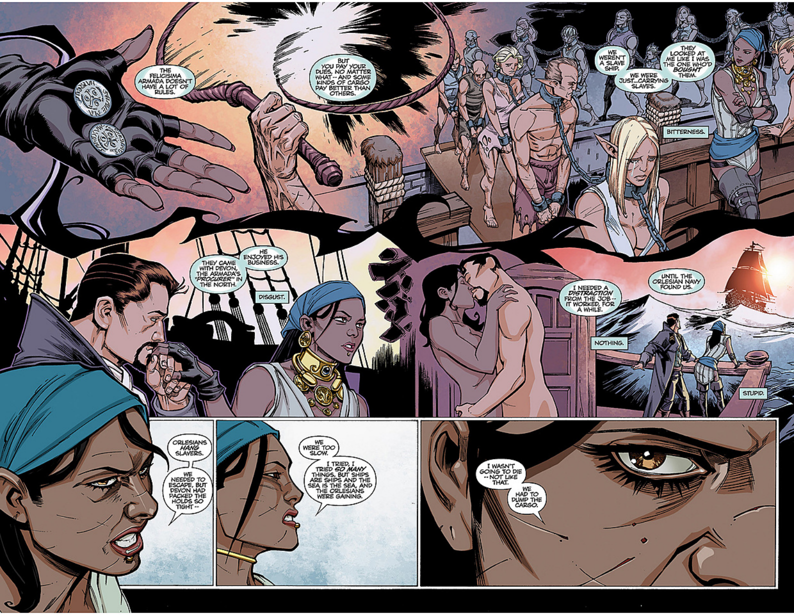

LONG AGO, THE HUMANS OF TEVINTER WORSHIPED *OLD GODS.*
THE OLD GODS WERE LIKE UNTO *DRAGONS,* AS THE FIRST HUMAN KINGS WERE LIKE UNTO ORDINARY MEN.
SO IT IS WRITTEN IN THE TOME OF KOSLUN.
"YOU KNOW THE HISTORY, AND YOU HAVE SEEN THE DECAYING IDOLS THAT REMAIN.
"THE OLD GODS GRANTED *POWER* TO THEIR WORSHIPERS IN EXCHANGE FOR SACRIFICES OF BLOOD.
"AURELIAN TITUS KNOWS THE HISTORY, AS WELL.
"HE ENDEAVORS TO REIGNITE A SPARK THAT DIED LONG AGO, GRASPING FOR THE POWER OF ANCIENTS.
"I DO NOT KNOW HOW, OR WHAT HE WISHES TO ACCOMPLISH.
"BUT SHOULD HE SUCCEED, HE WILL BE A THREAT TO ALL."
WHY WOULD HE CARE ABOUT ME?
HRR.
OF THIS, I AM UNCERTAIN.

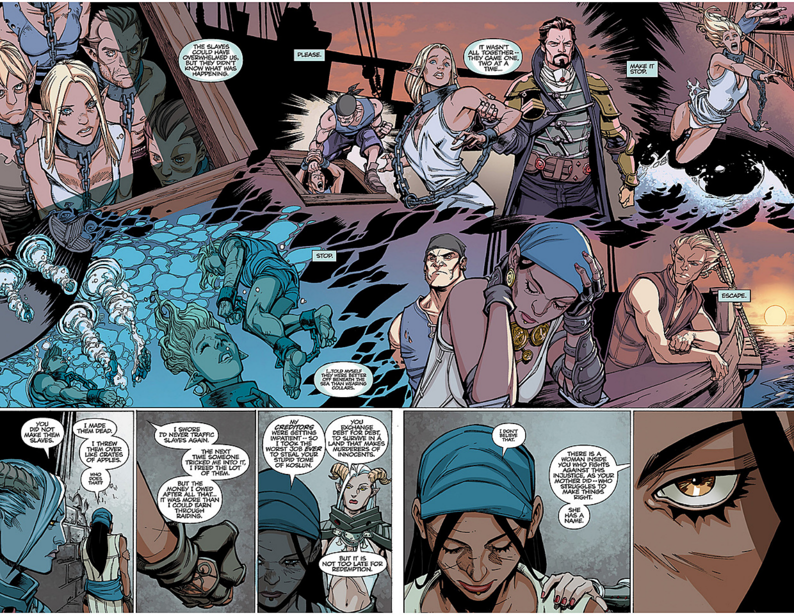

BUT UNTIL THIS HUMAN IS STOPPED, YOU WILL REMAIN A *GUEST* HERE IN AKHAAZ.
WHY WOULD HE CARE ABOUT MY *FATHER?*
WHAT DO *DRAGONS* HAVE TO DO WITH MY *BLOODLINE,* OR THE POWER OF THE WORLD?
YOU KNOW *MORE* THAN YOU'RE SAYING!
YOU ARE *BASALIT-AN,* ALISTAIR -- AN OUTSIDER WORTHY OF RESPECT.
FOR THAT REASON, AND THAT REASON ALONE, ARE YOU AND YOUR DWARF SPARED.
WHAT ABOUT ISABELA?
BE GRATEFUL FOR *YOUR* FATE.
DO NOT SEEK TO SPEAK WITH ME AGAIN.

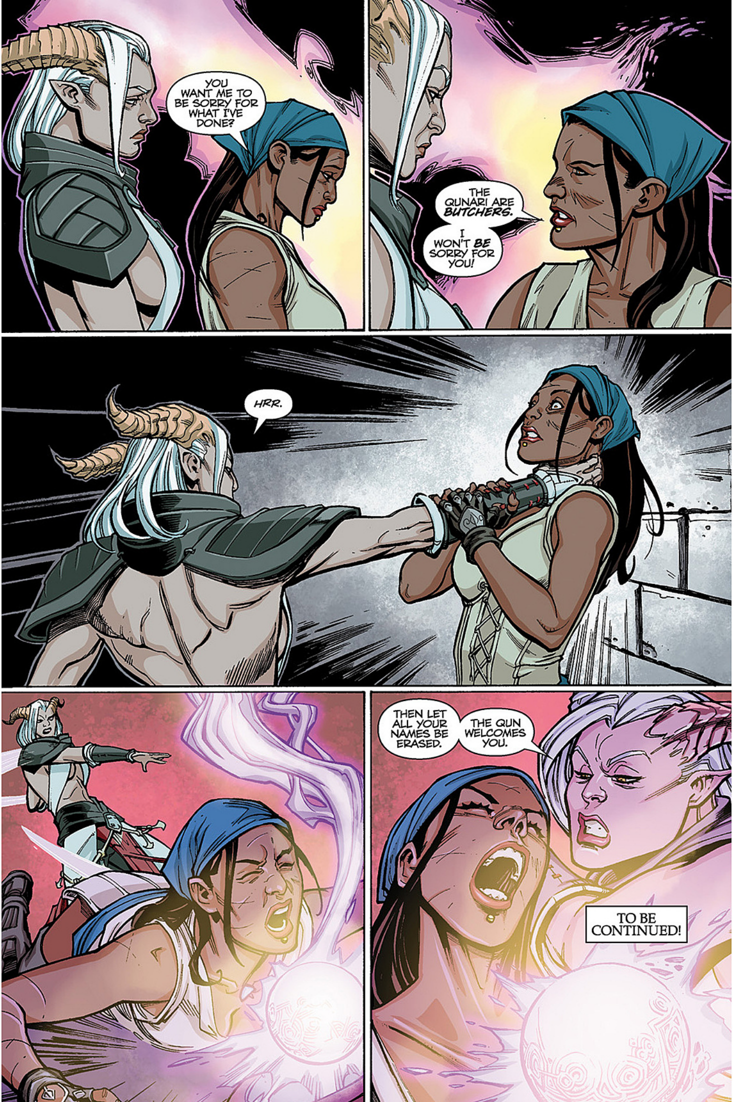

YOUR NAME.
THAT'S ALL YOU KEEP ASKING.
WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?
WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT YOU NOT TELL ME?
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY MOTHER?
TELL ME OF HER, AND PERHAPS I CAN ANSWER.


I GREW UP IN RIVAIN.
QUNARI *EMISSARIES* WERE ALWAYS AROUND -- EASIER THAN FIGHTING THEM OFF, AND THEY STAYED AWAY FROM THE NOBILITY.
I DON'T REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST HEARD ABOUT THE QUN, BUT IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE MY MOTHER *BELIEVED.*
SHE'D SNEAK OFF TO THE TEMPLE BEFORE DAWN -- SHE SWALLOWED EVERY LIE YOU PEOPLE FED HER.
LITTLE GIRL'S JEALOUSY.
LIKE SHE THOUGHT SLAVERY ISN'T SLAVERY IF YOU CALL IT A *CODE.*
SHE WANTED TO JOIN THE QUNARI, AND I DIDN'T --
HEARTBREAK.
-- SO SHE SOLD ME TO AN ANTIVAN MERCHANT.
THAT'S THE LAST I SAW OF HER.
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HER.
YOU WRITE IT ALL DOWN. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE *COME* HERE WITHOUT --
YOUR MOTHER IS VERY LIKELY AMONG THE VIDDATHAARI OF PAR VOLLEN, SERVING THE QUN, WORKING THE FIELDS, AND TREASURED BY ALL.
BUT I COULD NOT BE CERTAIN WITHOUT CONSULTING OUR RECORDS, AND THEY ARE FAR AWAY.
DO YOU REGRET YOUR PARTING?
I... DIDN'T LIKE LEAVING IT THAT WAY.
WOULD YOUR LIFE HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT HAD YOU REMAINED WITH HER?
WOULD IT HAVE BEEN BETTER?
I DON'T REGRET MY LIFE.
DO YOU NOT?


WHEN I...ESCAPED LUIS, I JOINED THE FELICISIMA ARMADA.
THE PIRATE FLEET?
OH, *YES*.
LIFE!
IT WAS GLORIOUS-- ADVENTURE AROUND EVERY CORNER.
I WAS QUEEN OF THE EASTERN SEAS, AND ALL THE MEN FEARED ME.
OR *WANTED* ME-- AND THAT WAS FINE, TOO.
COMFORT.
THERE WAS *NOTHING* I COULDN'T HAVE.
AND THEN I STOLE YOUR PRECIOUS BOOK, AND YOU DESTROYED MY FIRST SHIP.
FOURTH BIG MISTAKE.
IT WAS BAD FOR A WHILE, BUT THINGS GOT BETTER AFTER KIRKWALL.
YOU BEGAN TAKING COIN FROM KING ALISTAIR OF FERELDEN.
YOU HAVE *ANOTHER* SHIP NOW.
HUMILIATION.
NOT ANYMORE.
YOU GOT YOUR BOOK *BACK*, YOU LOCKED ME AWAY--YOU WIN!
WHY ALL THE QUESTIONS? JUST *PUNISH* ME ALREADY!
I WOULD KNOW *WHY* YOU STOLE THE TOME OF KOSLUN.
IT WAS A *JOB*--RUNNING A SHIP IS EXPENSIVE.
NO MORE THAN IT EVER HAD BEEN, SURELY.
WHAT CHANGED?
I...
TELL ME.


THE FELICISIMA ARMADA DOESN'T HAVE A LOT OF RULES.
BUT YOU PAY YOUR DUES, NO MATTER WHAT -- AND SOME KINDS OF CARGO PAY BETTER THAN OTHERS.
WE WEREN'T A SLAVE SHIP.
WE WERE JUST...CARRYING SLAVES.
THEY LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS THE ONE WHO'D *BOUGHT* THEM.
BITTERNESS.
THEY CAME WITH DEVON, THE ARMADA'S *"PROCURER"* IN THE NORTH.
HE ENJOYED HIS BUSINESS.
DISGUST.
I NEEDED A *DISTRACTION* FROM THE JOB -- IT WORKED, FOR A WHILE.
NOTHING.
UNTIL THE ORLESIAN NAVY FOUND US.
STUPID.
ORLESIANS *HANG* SLAVERS.
WE NEEDED TO ESCAPE, BUT DEVON HAD PACKED THE HOLDS SO TIGHT --
WE WERE TOO SLOW.
I TRIED, I TRIED *SO MANY* THINGS, BUT SHIPS ARE SHIPS AND THE SEA IS THE SEA, AND THE ORLESIANS WERE GAINING.
I WASN'T GOING TO DIE -- NOT LIKE THAT.
WE HAD TO DUMP THE CARGO.


THE SLAVES COULD HAVE OVERWHELMED US, BUT THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING.
PLEASE.
IT WASN'T ALL TOGETHER -- THEY CAME ONE, TWO AT A TIME...
MAKE IT STOP.
STOP.
ESCAPE.
I...TOLD MYSELF THEY WERE BETTER OFF BENEATH THE SEA THAN WEARING COLLARS.
YOU DID NOT MAKE THEM SLAVES.
I MADE THEM DEAD.
I THREW THEM OVER LIKE CRATES OF APPLES.
WHO DOES THAT?
I SWORE I'D NEVER TRAFFIC SLAVES AGAIN.
THE NEXT TIME SOMEONE TRICKED ME INTO IT, I FREED THE LOT OF THEM.
BUT THE MONEY I OWED AFTER ALL THAT... IT WAS MORE THAN I COULD EARN THROUGH RAIDING.
MY *CREDITORS* WERE GETTING IMPATIENT -- SO I TOOK THE WORST JOB *EVER* TO STEAL YOUR STUPID TOME OF KOSLUN.
YOU EXCHANGE DEBT FOR DEBT, TO SURVIVE IN A LAND THAT MAKES MURDERERS OF INNOCENTS.
BUT IT IS NOT TOO LATE FOR REDEMPTION.
I DON'T BELIEVE THAT.
THERE IS A WOMAN INSIDE YOU WHO FIGHTS AGAINST THIS INJUSTICE, AS YOUR MOTHER DID -- WHO STRUGGLES TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT.
SHE HAS A NAME.


YOU WANT ME TO BE SORRY FOR WHAT I'VE DONE?
THE QUNARI ARE *BUTCHERS.*
I WON'T *BE* SORRY FOR YOU!
HRR.
THEN LET ALL YOUR NAMES BE ERASED.
THE QUN WELCOMES YOU.
TO BE CONTINUED!